



HELPFILE

PUT YOUR QUESTIONS TO OUR TECHNICAL EXPERTS

Contents

HELPFILE

Paul Mullen answers your computing queries

How do I troubleshoot a dead PC? 262

Problems sending large emails 263

Wanted: wireless setup for old laptop 263

How do I get NTFS performance? 264

Backing up emails in Thunderbird 265

Renew, upgrade or ditch Norton AntiVirus? 265

Windows setup fails 265

Factfile: Help! I can't access secure sites 266

Update: Annoying music vibrations 266

Windows says my anti-virus software is inactive 267

AOL concerns with new PC 267

IVAN IWANNADO 269

Ivan tries geocaching

NIGEL KNOWITALL 270

Mapping a colon to the numeric keypad in Excel • Removing text boxes from prints • Removing Word's annoying checks • Feedback: number progression

BUYING CLINIC 272

Multifunction muddle • I need a scanner for wage slips • Which ADSL router? • Wanted: Media Center PC • Why go MIMO? • Where am I?

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When writing to *Helpfile*, please try to give full details of your problem. We also require both daytime and evening phone numbers in case we need more information. Although the policy of *Computer Shopper* is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in *Helpfile* so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to helpfile@computershopper.co.uk). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so.

PAUL MULLEN

Paul has been a transport demand forecaster, economic adviser to the government and IT consultant to many big companies, and has been using and writing software for personal computers since 1978

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HARDWARE FAILED FAN

HOW DO I TROUBLESHOOT A DEAD PC?

Q My desktop PC has just failed. Prior to this there were no problems and I've made no changes to the hardware or software recently. Initially it locked up and I pressed reset. It failed to reboot and nothing appeared on the screen.

The processor voltages are all OK, but I've noticed that the system cooling fan isn't running and there's no power LED lit. The processor fan is OK, though. The fan is serviceable, but there's no voltage going to it. Pressing the reset button brings the hard disk activity LED on for a few seconds but then it goes out. I can hear the hard disk power up and the CD drives indicate activity. All voltages to these drives are correct.

I'm finding it very difficult to locate faults without a display and have no spares for swapping about, so any help you can provide will be much appreciated. Would I be right in thinking I have a motherboard failure?

My next step, after getting your advice, is to remove the motherboard and reseat all the components in case of heat creep. Is this a good idea?

Eric Woolley, erolwoolley@waitrose.com

A It could be a bad power supply, processor, motherboard or, if you are lucky, a bad modem, network, sound or graphics card. To start with, remove everything that is not absolutely essential. This includes the modem, network card, sound card and so on. Often, when



one of these cards fails, it shorts out and prevents the whole motherboard receiving power.

Modem and network cards can fail during thunderstorms. Disconnect the power and ribbon cables for all drives and similar devices. You can even remove the graphics card and pull out the memory modules if you don't have any luck after removing everything else; the fact that the fan is not operating is a fair sign the system is not powering up.

If this does not help, try resetting the CMOS memory. Usually there are three pins, with a jumper over two of them, sitting near the CMOS battery. Move the jumper to the other position. If there is no jumper you can remove the battery for five minutes. After you reset the jumper back to normal, try again.

Just in case the on/off switch has failed, switch its wires with those of the reset switch and see if the reset switch turns on the PC. The on/off switch on all ATX-style computers just makes a momentary contact, like the reset switch, so you should be OK. For systems without a reset switch, you can use a screwdriver or similar metal tool briefly to short across the pins into which the wires from the on/off switch connect.

If you still have no luck, the problem must be something to do with the power supply, motherboard or processor, and the only way to tell which is to replace them in turn. If you don't have a repair shop with spare parts around, you might have to consider buying a new system. After all, if you have to buy a new motherboard, it would be a shame not to upgrade your processor as well.



PC Hardware Annoyances

If you send our star letter, you'll receive a prize. This month's winner gets a copy of O'Reilly's *PC Hardware Annoyances*, which will help you fix any number of hardware problems. If you don't want to spend the rest of your life troubleshooting, make sure you keep this next to your PC along with the latest copy of *Computer Shopper*. Your PC woes will disappear.





EMAIL VIRUS SCANNING

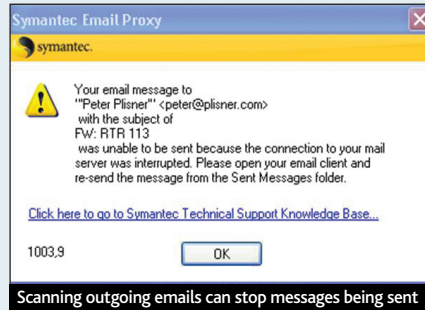
PROBLEM SENDING LARGE EMAILS

Q While sending a large 11MB email, I received an error message that appears to be generated by my virus software (Norton AntiVirus 2003). It said, "Your email message to <address> with the subject <subject> was unable to be sent because the connection to your mail server was interrupted. Please open your email client and re-send the message from the Sent Messages folder."

I did try to resend the message, but got the same message.

My first thought was that my ISP, which is BT Openworld, might have a 10MB limit on emails. However, its helpline has confirmed that this email size sits comfortably within its 20MB maximum. It suggested that it might be my firewall.

The link that accompanies the error message also points to a possible issue with the firewall. I have two firewalls on my system.



One is provided by Windows XP, which I have switched off, but the error message still appears. The other firewall is provided by my router, a Vigor 2200 USB. I have looked at the Control Panel, but there doesn't seem to be anywhere that deals with email traffic.

Can you help me to unravel this mystery?
Peter Plisner, peter@plisner.com

A Eleven megabytes is large for an email. Not long ago, many email systems had a limit of just 1MB, and many systems still have 3-5MB limits. However, if your ISP allows emails of up to 20MB, you should be all right.

A firewall is unlikely to cause this problem, as the TCP/IP transmission is broken up into packets, each no more than 1,500 bytes, and firewalls handle each packet separately.

It could be that Norton AntiVirus is taking so long to scan the outgoing email, the receiving mail server thinks it's lost the connection. In any case, we don't see much point in scanning outgoing emails. If a virus has infected your system and Norton didn't spot it, it probably won't spot the outgoing infected emails. Most viruses also have their own methods of sending emails that bypass Norton's outgoing mail scan.

If you open Norton AntiVirus, click on Options and Email, you can disable 'Scan outgoing email'. Your email should then be sent perfectly.

PC CARD COMPATIBILITY

WANTED: WIRELESS SETUP FOR OLD LAPTOP

Q Having joined the broadband age, my kids now want to connect their computers to the internet. My son has a desktop and my daughter has a Toshiba Satellite Pro 420CDT laptop. I wanted to use an ad hoc wireless setup so I could limit access times to the internet. I installed an MSI PC54G2 card in my desktop PC, as well as that belonging to my son. This works well.

The problem is with the laptop. I bought an MSI CB54G2, but discovered that a CardBus card doesn't fit a PCMCIA slot. The laptop runs Windows 98 and previously had an Ethernet card fitted, which has been lost.

Having read through the recent articles on wireless setups and equipment, I wanted to know if I could connect the laptop via an Ethernet card to a wireless router and then wirelessly to my desktop, which connects via USB to my broadband modem. If that won't work, do you have any other suggestions for less than £100?

Phil Back, back1@btinternet.com

A CardBus is the 32-bit version of PCMCIA, the credit card-sized plug-in cards for notebooks. As you've found, most wireless cards you find in stores are designed for CardBus slots. CardBus was introduced in 1996, around the same time as USB connectors appeared. While the older 16-bit PCMCIA (also called PC Cards) cards fit into CardBus slots, and CardBus slots are often referred to as PCMCIA slots, CardBus cards will not work or even properly fit in 16-bit PCMCIA slots.

All add-on USB cards for notebook computers require CardBus, as do many networking adaptors. You can find more technical information at www.pcmcia.org/faq.htm. Externally, there is little

difference in appearance between the 16- and 32-bit slots, and the connectors are not easily visible. CardBus cards have small, rivet-like bumps on the metal end and are designed so they won't physically fit fully in to a non-CardBus slot.

Since CardBus appeared close to the time that USB connections were introduced, most notebooks with USB will likely support CardBus cards and those



without USB probably don't. It was about the same time that Pentium II replaced the first Pentium processors. Check the notebook's specifications to be sure. You can right-click on My Computer and choose Properties to open Device Manager. Under PCMCIA Adaptors, you will see devices that mention CardBus or PC Card. If you don't see CardBus, your notebook doesn't support it.

If your computer supports it, CardBus is better than PC Card for any networking card. It has a much higher data transfer rate (PC Card has a maximum internal data transfer rate of 20Mbit/s)

and this is essential for 802.11a or 802.11g. It also supports direct memory access (DMA) and bus-mastering, just like PCI card slots on a desktop computer. DMA and bus-mastering greatly reduce the load on the processor when transferring data.

If your notebook was one of the few that had USB ports but no CardBus, you can add a USB wireless adaptor. These are easy to find, but chances are you won't have USB either. In this case, you need to find a 16-bit PCMCIA wireless card. These are harder to locate, but do exist. We prefer Proxim's Orinoco Gold Classic. When this first came out, it was regarded as the Rolls-Royce of wireless cards; it is still the favourite of wireless hackers, since it supports an external antenna and works with many third-party utilities.

Orinoco cards also have drivers for a wide range of operating systems, including Windows 95 and NT4. Many other wireless cards require Windows 98 Second Edition or later.

Be very cautious when buying. We have seen many websites, even reputable firms such as Maplin Electronics, incorrectly describe CardBus wireless adaptors as PCMCIA and fail to state that these are 32-bit CardBus cards. If the card supports 802.11g, it will never be a 16-bit card.

Some early wireless cards are also 16-bit and you may be able to find used ones on eBay. Make sure you get an 802.11b card, which is compatible with the 802.11g standard used by most modern wireless routers. The only Linksys 16-bit 802.11b cards available are the WPC11, WPC11 2.5, WPC11 2.7, WPC11 3 and WPC11 3.1. The Linksys WPC11 4 (which replaced these earlier cards), WPC54G, WPC54GS, WPC54GX, WPC51AB and WPC55AG are all CardBus cards. Netgear's MA401 will work, but the MA521 needs CardBus.



FILE SYSTEMS OPTIMISATION

HOW DO I GET NTFS PERFORMANCE?

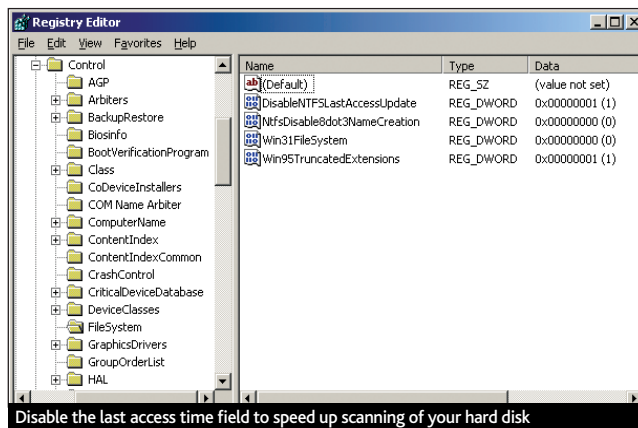
Q After reading the *Learn* section of your August 2005 issue, I am convinced I need to change the file system of my hard disk to NTFS, but I am unable to locate the Registry editor – probably due to senility. Could you please give me step-by-step guidance on how to locate it?

John Hardy, john.hardy587@ntlworld.com

A First of all, the tip given on page 238 of *Advanced Windows*, *Shopper* August 2005 is related to improving the performance of NTFS rather than creating an NTFS file system. To convert a FAT32 disk to NTFS, you need to click on the Start Menu and choose Run. Assuming the drive you want to convert is C:, type convert C: /fs:ntfs.

NTFS is a superior file system to FAT32 in most respects, but it does more record keeping and this can slow it down. On smaller drives of around 30 to 40GB, FAT32 tends to be significantly faster than NTFS. NTFS has better indexing, which makes it superior to FAT32 for drives of more than 60GB. For example, each time you modify a file, NTFS has to update the volume bitmap, a 2KB Master File Table (MFT) record, a folder index file and a journal log file. FAT32 just updates the File Allocation Table and a small 32-byte directory entry.

There are a couple of other instances where NTFS is faster. If you write lots of very short files, NTFS stores the file data in that large MFT record. Also, FAT32 drives become badly fragmented over time unless you run Defragmenter frequently. NTFS tries to spread files out over the whole disk surface and suffers less from this problem, unless your drive gets very full.



Having said that, we would not recommend users switch from NTFS to FAT32 to speed up their computers. The tip you read in the article may speed up NTFS provided you understand the limitations. The first Registry change disables the creation of short 8+3 alternate filenames. These are rarely used if you don't use 16-bit programs.

Changing this won't change the amount of data NTFS has to write to disk, because it still writes the entire MFT record. Generating short names won't take a significant amount of processor time, so it probably won't speed anything up by a noticeable amount. Furthermore, disabling 8+3 names prevents you installing programs that use 16-bit installers. Search <http://support.microsoft.com> for NtfsDisable8dot3NameCreation, and you'll see a number of problems that it can cause. So forget about the first part of the tip; it is useful only for certain kinds of network file server and rarely on users' systems.

The second part of the tip involves disabling the last access time field. By default, NTFS updates this field in the MFT and the directory index every time a file is read, including every time an anti-virus or anti-spyware scan checks the file. Turning this off can speed up file reads a lot. Most backups work by the date last modified, or by checking the archive flag that shows if a file has been modified since the previous backup. The date last accessed is used by the Disk Cleanup

Wizard, which offers to compress files that have not been accessed recently.

I recommend that only experienced users modify the Registry. Before doing so I recommend you create a Restore Point. Go to Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools and System Restore. To edit the Registry, click on Start, Run, type in RegEdit and click OK. In the Registry Editor, click on the '+' signs in the left column to expand entries. For this change you need to click on HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE, then System, CurrentControlSet, Control, and highlight FileSystem.

When you click on FileSystem, the right-hand window should show several entries. Right-click in an empty area of the right window and choose New, Dword Value. Type in the name DisableNTFSLastAccessUpdate then click on it and enter Value Data 1. Once you reboot, the Date Last Accessed will no longer be modified, and scanning your hard disk should be considerably faster.

OTHER THINGS TO TRY

IF YOU'RE STILL STRUGGLING WITH NTFS, CHANGING THE MASTER FILE TABLE MIGHT SPEED THINGS UP

Here's another tip that can considerably speed up NTFS if applied to a brand new system. Add another Dword value called NtfsMftZoneReservation and set its value to 2 or higher. An NTFS drive starts off with a fairly small number of entries in its MFT but reserves some space just after it for the MFT to grow as more files are added. This special reserved MFT zone won't be used for any other files until the whole disk is used up.

Unfortunately, the team that designed Internet Explorer decided to store very large numbers of tiny files, such as cookies, bookmarks and so on, as single files rather than as entries in a single database file. So Windows creates over 100,000 files on a drive, which means that before long the MFT needs to expand to another area of the drive. Shortly after that it needs to expand to another part and so on. We have seen NTFS drives where the MFT is spread over more than 200 separate areas of the drive. The standard Disk Defragmenter does not defragment the MFT, so

this just gets worse over time. Since the MFT is the most used file on the drive, this could slow things down tremendously.

The official Microsoft Knowledge Base article refuses to state the percentage of disk space allocated by each value, saying it changes between different versions of Windows. However, an article in Microsoft's Technet (www.microsoft.com/technet/scriptcenter/guide/sas_fsd_xdvz.mspx) states that for Windows 2000 a value of 1 reserves one-eighth of the volume for the MFT, a value of 2 reserves a quarter, a value of 3 reserves three-quarters and a value of 4 is half the volume for MFT entries. Our experience is that under Windows XP, NTFS allocates space for the MFT more conservatively. We suggest that you set this value to 2, particularly if you have created a small system partition, so the system reserves twice as much additional storage for the MFT.

Even if your drive does not need this storage for the MFT, it will still be available when files use up the remaining free space. Allocating too much

space for the MFT defeats the purpose, though. If the drive does use up all the other space, files will become more fragmented and then, once the system starts adding files into the MFT reserved area, it negates the point of reserving space and causes the MFT to become even more fragmented. NTFS drives fragment severely when they get more than 75 per cent full. To see how fragmented your MFT is, run Disk Defragmenter and generate a report. More information about MFT fragmentation can be found at <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/174619>.

The above change affects new MFT allocations only. If you already have a fragmented MFT, a few third-party utilities such as Executive Software's Diskeeper or VCOM's Partition Commander will defragment it. Even if you use the built-in Defragmenter, regular defragmentation of your drive will help greatly. To defragment other important system files, see Sysinternals's PageDefrag utility, available at www.sysinternals.com/utilities/pagedefrag.html.



FACTFILE

HELP! I CAN'T ACCESS SECURE SITES

If you've been denied access to secure websites but you don't know why, these tips will help

Q Three months after buying a new PC I couldn't get into my online banking secure site and one or two other secure sites. After a great deal of time, effort and cost, the system was completely reinstalled by the manufacturer. Everything worked fine, but we didn't know what went wrong. However, I have since learnt that I had more than one firewall running and it has been suggested this may have caused the problem.

It has now happened again. As well as being unable to access secure websites, there are a couple of smaller malfunctions as well. I have installed ZoneAlarm Security Suite 6, Spybot Search & Destroy and Ad-Aware SE Personal. ZoneAlarm's anti-spyware section will not update, so it is outdated by one month. The anti-virus part does update, though.

I inadvertently updated Windows Security Center; does this mean I had two firewalls running, briefly, at the same time? Normally I have the Windows firewall turned off.

Additionally, my non-default email address won't receive messages any more, even after re-entering my details. I have consulted various help topics and re-entered my SSL files. I have used System Restore, and I carry out scans using ZoneAlarm, Spybot and Ad-Aware every evening before switching off.

Do you think the possible doubling up of the firewall causes the problem, and is a clean install the only solution?

Trevor Norman, tenorman@ntlworld.com

A There are several things you need to check. It may not be a problem with your firewall settings.

1 Start by clicking on the time shown at the lower right corner of the Taskbar and check the date set on your computer.

If this is wrong, and particularly if it is set to the right day but the wrong year, it may be refusing to connect to secure websites because it considers their security certificate to be outdated.

2 Click on the icon for your firewall and disable it. This is rarely the problem, but it is possible that you have set up more than one firewall. In general, you should be running only one firewall product at a time. ZoneAlarm should disable the Windows SP2 Firewall automatically. But if you use ZoneAlarm, make sure any anti-virus software you run does not try to run its own firewall.

3 Click on Start, Run, type in Services.msc and click OK. Look for Cryptographic Services in the list and make sure it shows its status as Started. If not, click on it to get to its Properties window and check the Startup type is shown as Automatic. Click on Start Service.

4 Download the Mozilla Firefox browser if you don't have it already. You can see if the problem is with Internet Explorer by seeing if Firefox will access secure sites. Some secure sites have been designed to work only with Internet Explorer, but you should at least be able to connect to the secure site with Firefox, even if the website's features don't work. If Firefox works, you'll know the problem is with Internet Explorer and you can try the following steps to fix the problem.

5 Click on Help, About in Internet Explorer. The second line should say 'Cipher Strength: 128-bit'.

6 In the Tools menu, choose Internet Options. On the General tab, delete temporary files, including cookies. On the Security tab, click on Trusted sites then click the Default Level button. Next click on the Content tab and, under Certificates, choose Clear SSL State. This clears certain temporary files that may be corrupted. Under the Advanced tab, scroll down to the Security section. Check that Use SSL 2.0 and Use SSL 3.0 are selected. Just above these, untick 'Check for server certificate revocation'.

7 Use System File Checker to check for missing or damaged essential Windows files. To do this, click Start and then Run, type cmd and then click OK. At

the command prompt, type sfc /scannow and press Enter. You may be asked to insert your Windows XP CD.

8 You might have to re-register certain system DLL files. Click Start and then Run, type cmd and then click OK. At the command prompt, type the following lines and press Enter after each line:

regsvr32 softpub.dll

regsvr32 wintrust.dll

regsvr32 initpki.dll

regsvr32 dssenh.dll

regsvr32 rsaenh.dll

regsvr32 gpkcsp.dll

regsvr32 sccbase.dll

regsvr32 slbcsp.dll

regsvr32 cryptdlg.dll

For each file, you should get a message saying, "DllRegisterServer succeeded". Click OK. At the end, type Exit to close the prompt window.

9 The problem may also be caused by a corrupted user profile in the Registry. If you have more than one user account set up, or you create a new user profile for test purposes, log in as a different user and see if you can access secure sites from there. If the problem is with your user profile, you can set up a new profile then follow the procedures described in Microsoft Knowledge Base article 811151 (<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/811151>) to copy data from your old profile.

To delete the old profile after you have copied all the data, right-click on My Computer, choose Properties then click the Advanced tab and click Settings under User Profiles. Look at the list of Profiles stored on this computer, click the user profile that you want to delete and then click Delete.

FEEDBACK SUBWOOFER

ANNOYING MUSIC VIBRATIONS



In *Shopper* August 2005, Mike Doughty asked if vibrations from a subwoofer could damage his PC if he placed them close together. We could only speculate at the time, but this month we were brought an ultra-thin notebook that wouldn't boot.

We noticed that the hard disk was acting as a magnet and picking up screws. It would even stick to the side of a filing cabinet. Even the motherboard was magnetic and able to pick up screws. The hard disk wasn't readable at all and the motherboard wouldn't boot.

The owner hadn't used the notebook for several months and had left it on top of a large speaker enclosure. It appears the magnetic field from large speakers can indeed cause damage. Be wary of placing any computer close to a strong magnet such as those in big speakers.



ANTI-VIRUS SECURITY CENTER

WINDOWS SAYS MY ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE IS INACTIVE

Q My new computer came with Panda Antivirus 2004 installed. Every time I switch it on, I get a message from the Windows XP Security Center telling me anti-virus is switched off and I should click "this bubble" to fix it. Clicking the bubble merely shows that anti-virus protection is off and does not fix it. The advice is to switch it on.

When I click on the Panda icon, there's no switch on or switch off button. Clicking Update brings up a message from Panda saying the PC has the latest updates and no further updates are necessary. It then says, "Your computer is properly protected [with] protection level high". This causes the Security Centre to change to anti-virus switched on.

The Panda software is set to update automatically. Why does Security Center always report that Panda antivirus is switched off when it is on? Or is Security Center right, and has Panda initially switched itself off?

I have written to and emailed Panda 11 times but have never got so much as an acknowledgement. Using Panda's own email technical support results in the casual "Error message not delivered". But sending a message via the program's own email suggestion box (to which the company says it does not reply) goes through immediately



and successfully. As soon as this current anti-virus paid contract ends in June 2006, I shall switch to F-Secure.

Terry Lamyman, tal24@lycos.co.uk

A The Windows Security Center alerts are a new feature in Windows XP Service Pack 2. The most likely cause of the warning message is that Panda Antivirus is working but is not properly reporting to Windows. This is to be expected as your 2004 version, which was released late in 2003, came out well before SP2. We are assured the 2005 versions of Panda's software function correctly with Windows Security Center.

Although it seems like a good idea for Windows to warn users if their anti-virus protection is disabled or out of date, it does rely on the anti-virus program reporting its status correctly to Windows Security Center. There has also been some speculation that a virus could disable anti-virus protection but then report to Windows Security Center that protection is still enabled. Most anti-virus vendors deal with the problem simply by disabling warnings from Windows Security Center and generate their own warnings instead. We suggest you click on the Windows Security Center icon in Control Panel and tell it you will monitor anti-virus status yourself. Then rely on Panda to tell you if anything is amiss.

If you want to make sure your anti-virus protection is working properly, you can download a harmless test virus from www.eicar.org/anti_virus_test_file.htm. When you try to download this file, which comes packed in various forms to check that your anti-virus software is catching all possible variants, the real-time protection should pop up a warning and block the download.

If, however, you are interested in F-Secure, then turn to page 247 of this issue and find out how to use the free trial version of F-Secure Internet Security 2006 on this month's cover disc.

ISP AOL CONCERNS

AOL CONCERNS WITH NEW PC

Q I've just bought the Mesh Matrix Titan Vision, which you awarded five stars (Labs £999 PCs, *Shopper* September 2005). Now it's here, I am fretting about our ISP. We have been using AOL Broadband for years without any problem. However, my computer geek friends say not to load it as it works like a virus and I'll never get rid of it.

M Monteath, monteathm@aol.com

A Your geek friends probably also advise people not to buy a car with automatic transmission, as it takes too much control away from the driver. AOL does design its service for the less knowledgeable user and does its best to conceal the complications of setting up an internet connection from those users. If that's what you want, then it's fine.

AOL used to receive criticism for being relatively slow, though this is not so noticeable these days. It is also more expensive than certain other providers. In its favour, AOL does a good job of protecting its users from spam, viruses and, to some extent, spyware. There are also concerns that its methods of doing so are too heavy-handed; for

example, it blocks the delivery of emails that happen to contain mention of a website AOL does not like. There's a report of this at www.langa.com/newsletters/2004/2004-04-19.htm#2.

Perhaps the most serious criticism of AOL is that while it is good at blocking adware and spyware from other vendors, it is itself adware, blasting far more adverts at its users than many would want to see. We like to use Mozilla Firefox with its Adblock extension; if the adverts on any web page get too irritating we simply tell Adblock to remove them. You can't block AOL adverts while using AOL 9's built-in browser or other features. However, once you have connected with AOL 9 you can minimise it and use any browser you wish. You can even check your AOL mail through a web browser such as Firefox.

AOL has been criticised in the past for hijacking browser settings, in a similar way to some spyware. When you installed previous versions of AOL's software or downloaded free software such as AOL Messenger, they changed Internet Explorer's security settings, adding the free.aol.com website into Internet Explorer's trusted sites security zone, which then allowed AOL to download ActiveX

components to your computer without your consent. After user complaints, and with the introduction of stronger security in Windows XP SP2, AOL stopped doing this.

We have not come across any recent problems related to removing AOL's software. There were reports about five years ago of bugs in removing AOL 5, which messed up internet settings; perhaps your friends are thinking of these old reports? Like many software applications, the uninstaller is not perfect and leaves behind bits and pieces, including an annoying icon on the desktop, just in case you want to reinstall AOL. This icon can simply be deleted.

It is a pain trying to save emails stored in your AOL account, even if you download them to the Personal Filing Cabinet on your local hard disk. They can be accessed only through the AOL software. A program called AOLLeave can export mail (www.aolleave.com), but it works only with older versions of AOL software. If you understand German, there is a program called AOL-Dump from www.datanorm-software.de, which we have not tried. There is also a commercial service available from www.pwcrack.com/pfc.shtml. **CS**